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ABSTRACT

In February 1995, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) established a committee to study accessibility and opportunity within the community college system. This document provides the Committee's report, focusing on changing conditions and challenges facing the system. Following introductory materials, a paradigm shift between the 1950's and the present is described with reference to the job skills currently needed by high school graduates to compete for entry-level jobs. Next; general characteristics of the state's community college students are described, including the fact that the "typical" student is a 31-year old adult beyond traditional college age, and the most significant barriers faced by these adult students are reviewed, including financial, personal, preparational, geographical, and cultural barriers. Finally, the following six recommendations are presented: (1) reduce financial barriers by modifying the financial aid system, controlling the growth of tuition and fees, and increasing resources to make college more affordable; (2) ensure access by implementing innovative methods for delivering instruction; (3) implement an educational system that moves students from school to work regardless of what point they enter the community college; (4) provide an education that guarantees student success in the job market; (5) enhance teaching and learning through technology, research, and experimentation with classroom teaching; and (6) provide an inclusive, multicultural climate for learning that acknowledges diversity. A list of Board members and information on fiscal year 1995 financial aid eligibility and awards are appended. (TGI)

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REPORT OF THE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE

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By the year 2000, 85% of the population will require some type of education beyond high school to meet the needs of the workplace.

Where will people go to receive the education and training they need? Up to now, many people have turned to community colleges. By making higher education accessible and affordable, community colleges have democratized education.

Now, however, too many barriers to higher education are being placed in people's way. Unless all our citizens, no matter what their academic preparation, economic level, race, gender, or ethnic background, can access higher education, ours will be a society of Haves and Have-Nots.

The vision statement of the Illinois Community College System's strategic plan, Vision 2000: Charting a Course for the Future, states that now is the time for the community college system to blaze new trails. The first trail to be blazed is removing the barriers to access and opportunity.

With this report by the Illinois Community College Board's Committee on Access and Opportunity, let the trailblazing begin.

—October 1995

WHY THE COMMITTEE WAS CREATED

Realizing that we are living in a rapidly changing world and that the educational system must change in order to meet the challenges of that changing world, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) established a committee in February 1995 to study accessibility and opportunity within the community college system.

The appointment of the committee came on the heels of the release of the 1994 report of the Board of Higher Education's Committee to Study Affordability and State Superintendent of Education Joseph A. Spagnolo's paper, "The Illinois Quality Schools Initiative: Building the Foundations for Change."

These reports raised a number of issues within the community college system centering around affordability and its relationship to access and opportunity. To address these issues, ICCB created a committee to study the major issues of access and opportunity. Paramount among these issues were access to higher education for low income students, underrepresented groups, and poorly prepared students; workforce development; and the economic benefit of investment in community college education.

The comprehensive community college system was built upon the concept of access. It is the only system of higher education that provides access to a wide variety of educational opportunities for all who can benefit from such endeavors.

Access alone, however, is not enough. Colleges must also provide students with the set of circumstances (opportunity) which will lead to meeting their goals.

When the educational goal a student is pursuing is affordable, access and opportunity are enhanced. One of the hallmarks of a community college education is the relatively low tuition cost. When combined with quality instruction and physical accessibility, affordability provides a major incentive for students to pursue a postsecondary education at a community college.

In a period of scarce resources, the concepts of accessibility and opportunity raise a number of issues, including:

- Are there unnecessary barriers to access?
- Are there ways of sharing resources within and among institutions that will increase access and enable community colleges to remain affordable for all?

The community college system recognizes that the community it serves is multicultural, economically diverse, global, and changing. Community colleges must be flexible enough to adapt to diverse students and their changing goals. It is imperative that we reflect in our education and training the rapidly evolving business and industry environment and the need to develop a highly skilled workforce with cross-cultural, cross-racial, and cross-gender skills.

What follows is a combination of reality and vision; obstacles and opportunities; common sense and bold dreaming.

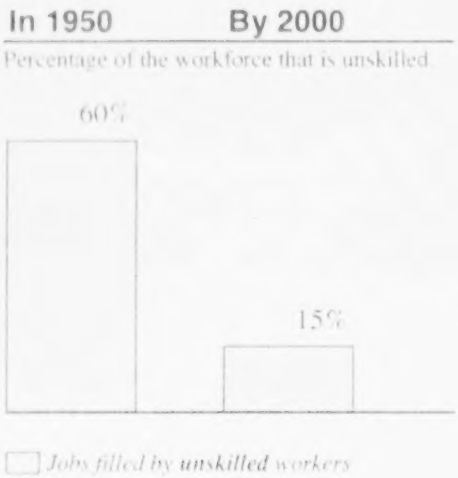
PARADIGM SHIFT

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* began with this headline:

Job Paradox: Manufacturers Decry a Major Shortage of Workers While Rejecting Many as Too Unskilled

The article went on to describe the plight of a 22 year old man in Ohio who had applied for a job at Lincoln Electric Co. three times in the past three years, but never got past a screening interview. "It is frustrating that I don't even have a chance," said the 22 year old.

The reason the young man has not been hired is because he lacks the skills required for even an entry-level job in today's workforce. We are experiencing a dramatic paradigm shift when it comes to skilled and unskilled workers.



In 1950, 60 percent of jobs could be filled by unskilled workers. By the year 2000, only 15 percent of jobs will be available to unskilled workers.

What these startling statistics tell us is that the average high school graduate of today faces a far different future than his or her parents. Jobs that offer middle income wages, such as automotive technician, nurse, physical therapy assistant, computer-aided design technician, bookkeeper, and secretary, require skill and education levels beyond those that typical high school students are attaining.

> Since the beginning of 1993, every business day an average of 2,389 American workers have learned that they would be losing their jobs.
>
> *Fortune Magazine, September 20, 1993*

It is not only the recent high school graduate who often must turn to community colleges for skill development. Nearly fifty percent of students enrolled in community colleges are not seeking degrees, but taking courses to upgrade their job skills. These students tend to be adults who already are in the job market or, due to downsizing, are trying to return to the workforce. These individuals must be retrained to meet the demands of business and industry.

It has been estimated that all technology is obsolete within five to seven years; in electronics, obsolescence occurs much faster, usually within two to three years. Without continually updating their skills, workers will be left behind by the rapidity of change.

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How dramatic is the need for skilled workers? Consider this: One year ago, the CEO of a large manufacturing plant in central Illinois stated that with starting wages of $9.00 per hour, his company did not have to "scrape the barrel" by hiring welfare recipients and the chronically unemployed.

Today, that same CEO is hiring the chronically unemployed. His company is working with a community college to train and develop entry-level workers. Why is the manufacturer now willing to support the development of these workers? Because without employees to fill the jobs, his plant would close.

Unfortunately, due to limitations in state and federal funding, community colleges cannot adequately respond to the needs of individuals who require job-readiness skills. Without sufficient funding, it is not only these individuals who "lose out." Employers will lose out by not having enough skilled workers to keep their businesses productive and competitive.

The challenge to the community college system is to provide the training needed for a growing number of our population who, only now, are beginning to recognize the high skill levels that are demanded by our nation's economy.

Students: Who we teach and how they've changed

If someone could take a "snapshot" of today and tomorrow's students, here is what it would look like:

- Over 20% will be poor.
- 60% from homes where mother works full-time.
- 20% from homes where other than English is spoken.
- 50% are children of color.
- Each year 700,000 drop out of high school.

In 1965 the community college system served 52,500 students who comprised less than 20 percent of the Illinois higher education student population. The students were typically transfer students who came with an adequate background in reading, writing, and general education. They were not that different from their university counterparts.

Today, community colleges currently serve 65 percent of those in public higher education, nearly one million Illinois citizens. In the 1990s, the "typical" community college student is 31 years old — an adult beyond the "traditional" college age. The "typical" community college student of today attends part-time. Approximately 60 percent are female. One-half of all community college students want to obtain either a transfer or occupational degree. The rest are attending for other reasons, for example, to learn a specific skill such as word processing.

Many are juggling jobs, raising children, and going to school. They are not even sure they belong in college, but they know there are fewer and fewer jobs that do not require some type of technical skill or knowledge.

> We should be educating more students, not fewer. College should be within the financial grasp of every qualified student.
>
> *— Community college president, testifying at IBHE hearings of the Committee to Study Affordability.*

Many of today's community college students are not comfortable in an academic setting since they are the first generation of their families to go beyond high school. Many lack study skills and have not learned how to learn.

Life in general has placed plenty of obstacles and barriers in the path of these students. If community colleges do not remove these barriers, they cannot realistically expect to fulfill their mission.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

If America is truly the "land of opportunity," then community colleges are many people's only "ticket" for arriving there.

Many students cannot use that "ticket" offered by community colleges because of barriers to entering college and barriers to staying there until they successfully complete their courses. Some of the most significant barriers faced by these adult students are described on the following pages.

Financial barriers may very well present the most serious concern to community colleges. Many of the students who attend community colleges do not have any level of support from family resources. Yet our current system of financial aid allocation assumes such a contribution.

Since the financial resources of students is not the primary factor in awarding financial aid, many community college students do not receive the necessary assistance to enroll or remain in college. In addition, the current allocation process that utilizes arbitrary cutoff dates for processing financial aid applications has a disproportionate negative effect on community college students. Hardest hit by this denial of financial aid may be the many part-time students or students who are also parents, who are struggling to make ends meet for both themselves and their families by working and going to college.

In an ongoing federal study of college learning outcomes, researchers from the University of Illinois - Chicago and Penn State University concluded that the cognitive impact of two-year colleges may be indistinguishable from those of four-year institutions. As a result, in an era of soaring tuition "two-year colleges may be a cost-effective means to obtain the first two years of college without sacrificing job market competitiveness."

— US News & World Report, September 25, 1995

According to recent information from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), students with no expected family contributions (zero EFC) may have limited access to higher education. In fiscal year 1995, 61 percent of the 86,400 zero EFC applicants received MAP payouts. Of the 20,571 new freshmen who did not receive awards, approximately 14,000 are community college students. (see Appendix A)

Community college students are the nation's greatest investment. Many come with significant unmet needs before they can undertake college-level work, yet studies have shown that investing in these students pays off.

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> Becoming a single parent was a difficult task, but even more so, I was not qualified to earn an income that would support our needs.
>
> *— female returning community college student, testifying at IBHE hearings of the Committee to Study Affordability*

At a time when the costs of attending a four-year college or university are escalating, while financial aid resources are dwindling, it makes sense to re-think how financial aid is awarded.

While financial barriers pose a serious concern for many individuals who might benefit significantly from attending a community college, other barriers demand attention, as well.

Personal barriers can be fear of failure, family or work responsibilities, negative peer pressure, or lack of definite goals. Students who have not been in school for some time may question whether they are capable of doing college work. The community college faces the challenge of providing supportive services that can help the student overcome the fear of failure. Such services include assessment to ensure that the student is placed in the appropriate course or program; counseling to help the student set realistic goals; and orientation activities to ease the student into the community college system.

Adult students who are self-conscious about returning to school need a support group of staff or adult students who can help them adjust and "blend-in." Likewise, attention is required for the 10th and 11th grade students who are good candidates for co-enrolling in a community college at the same time they are completing their high school education, or possibly participating in a school to work initiative.

Community colleges attract a diverse student population in age, race, gender, and culture. Many of them come to our institutions with unmet needs. These students are capable of achieving success, but they may require additional attention and support.

The supportive services our institutions provide can make the difference between these students achieving success in college and in the workplace or being left behind, with little hope of reaching their full potential.

Preparational barriers arise when a student needing remediation enters the community college. Many non-traditional students as well as a growing number of students right out of high school are not ready to do college-level coursework. The challenge to community colleges is to provide these students with a strong developmental program with flexible programming and a less-rigid timetable for completion .

Students requiring excessive remediation frequently drop out before completion because they become frustrated with time spent on courses that do not apply towards their goal of a degree or certificate. It is important that developmental education be integrated across general education disciplines.

Students who possess basic skills can still be poorly prepared if they have had no experience with advanced instructional technology such as computerized or video instruction. While telecommunications has helped to eliminate access barriers, it has also presented the colleges with the challenge of familiarizing students with the advanced technology used to deliver instruction while presenting the curricula.

At a time when one out of four adults does not possess functional literacy skills, it is essential that community colleges make developmental and remedial education an integral part of the institution. Also, there must be a seamless process that will ease the students into the "regular" college as developmental work is successfully completed.

Geographical barriers are the result of students being unable to enroll in specific academic or career programs and courses because they are not offered in the students' home districts. The IBHE and ICCB have strongly supported the establishment of regional consortia to better coordinate the delivery of programs in various geographical regions throughout Illinois.

The consortia concept has proven particularly successful in the area of telecommunications-based instructional delivery. The concept needs to be expanded and utilized in other cooperative educational ventures.

Another curricula-related barrier is that of **relevance**. Curricula must be more progressive, competency-based, and tied to the outcomes articulated by business and industry as entry-level skills. Community colleges must be accountable to their students and the potential employers of their students. This requires dialogue and true partnerships with business and industry.

Minority enrollment at community colleges in Illinois increased by 58 percent from 1988-93. We are overwhelmingly the first choice, and often the only choice, for minority students.

Last but surely not least, community colleges must address **cultural barriers**. The fact that nearly 60 percent ot all community college students are women and that community colleges are the overwhelming choice of minorities does not change the fact that these students often find themselves in a traditional, monocultural academic environment. Should we expect these diverse students to adapt to the status quo — or should our colleges be challenged to become more inclusive, in both institutional climate and curricula?

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CHALLENGES

In order for community colleges to continue fulfilling their important mission, they must boldly enter the next century and meet the following challenges head-on:

I. Challenge: To provide educational opportunities to all residents of the state irrespective of their financial status through modifying the financial aid system, controlling the growth of tuition and fees and other students costs, and increasing federal, state, and business resources in order to make college more affordable.

Recommendations:

1. Lower the Adjustable Available Income (AAI) formula rate in the state monetary award program to the federal methodology rate of 22 percent to increase access to students with low financial resources. Special priority should be placed on serving the need of the independent student with dependents (working parents).
2. Increase financial assistance to those students with zero expected family contribution by enacting a state assistance program supplemental to the monetary award program which provides funds above tuition and fees for those students with the fewest resources.
3. Ensure that those most in need receive financial assistance by simplifying the application and need evaluation processes, adjusting the application deadlines established for the Monetary Award Program, eliminating deadlines for completion of coursework which handicap students requiring developmental courses, and extending financial aid eligibility to students taking fewer than six hours per semester, thus extending the time needed for degree completion.
4. Create a new legislative initiative for families to save for their children's education that is accessible to "small savers" and that features tax-breaks for educational savings.
5. Support current IBHE policies on tuition and fee increases.
6. Appropriate state funding sufficient to support the mandated scholarship programs or eliminate the programs.
7. Encourage community colleges to develop deferred payment or flexible payment plans for students.
8. Focus the state's financial aid program on the resources of the individual, not the prices colleges charge.
9. Present a recommendation to ISAC which reflects a changing demography by defining need based on the financial resources of the student rather than costs of the individual colleges.
10. Lobby aggressively at the Federal level to protect/expand Pell grants and SEOG for low income students and other student aid.

II. **Challenge: *To implement innovative methods for delivering instruction which will* assure access and opportunity to all residents of Illinois regardless of age, locale, or life circumstances.**

Recommendations:

11. Collaborate with K-12, community colleges, and four-year public and private institutions to expand offerings of credit classes through telecommunications.
12. Encourage dual enrollment of community college students with four-year institutions.
13. Actualize the Illinois State Board of Education concept, "Quality Schools Initiative" (QSI), by providing funding for dual enrollment of high school students in vocational or transfer programs at the community college.
14. Maximize resources by collaboration among community colleges to regionalize programming and examine state policies concerning tuition, chargebacks, and access to housing, to ensure they do not discourage regional and statewide programs.
15. Use community college boundaries to define and facilitate the state school-to-work efforts as there currently exists a working relationship between high schools, community colleges, and area businesses.
16. Designate community colleges as the responsible entity to develop, coordinate and implement a state-wide plan for workforce development.
17. Establish each community college campus as a full-service site for the One-Stop Career Centers or, at the minimum, as a satellite site.
18. Expand the Opportunities Programs to all community colleges and increase the client base to assist movement of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients into the workforce.
19. Expand the membership of the Joint Education Committee to include membership from the community college sector in order to facilitate the coordination of programs on behalf of students.
20. Expand capstone technological programs with four-year universities which allow students receiving an Associate in Applied Science degree from community colleges to transfer to four-year institutions without the loss of credits.
21. Continue articulation efforts being undertaken by IBHE and ICCB.
22. Allow community colleges to offer capstone/joint degrees in cooperation with four-year institutions.
23. Study the feasibility of offering an advanced degree between associate and bachelor's degrees.
24. Finalize and activate the Workforce Preparation Action Plan of the State of Illinois Board of Higher Education.

III. **Challenge: To implement a seamless educational system that moves the students from school to work regardless of what point they enter the community college or their educational background and skill level.**

Fourteen percent of adults in Illinois lack a high school diploma. One out of four adults does not possess functional literacy skills.

The challenge to community colleges is to provide a strong developmental program that will address these barriers while easing these students into the "regular" college.

Recommendations:

25. Develop outreach campaigns that target nontraditional students, staffed by persons knowledgeable about and sensitive to their cultures and particular needs.
26. Provide a supportive network for nontraditional students, including advisement, the development of student assistance centers, orientation programs, and the use of peer counselors.
27. Offer GED classes and literacy training on every college campus and integrate these programs with the rest of the college to ease the transition of students into regular college courses.
28. Integrate instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and computing so that learners experience connected learning while improving basic skills. Evaluate developmental programs to document increases in student learning.
29. Remove the limitations in the state and federal adult education funding which, in effect, force students to choose between basic skills instruction and vocational pre-employment instruction.
30. Move the governance and administration of adult education to the Illinois Community College Board and implement a fair and equitable funding system for both community college and secondary school providers.

IV. **Challenge: To provide an education that truly meets the needs of the student and the community and that guarantees student success in the job market at the same time that it guarantees a highly skilled workforce for business and industry.**

Recommendations:

31. Deliver strong, current, technically advanced curricula and programs to ensure that students and businesses succeed in a competitive, global market.
32. Integrate business needs with education's goals through curriculum development, including preparing students to work in a culturally diverse workforce, with input from business or occupational advisory boards.
33. Strengthen ties to employers through CEO site visits, site based learning, learning activities directed at specific work-related projects and on-site consultations.
34. Develop more true business-education partnerships such as those with Caterpillar, John Deere, and Motorola, where business invests capital and operating funds in the community college in order to provide professional continuing education.

CONCLUSION

> What you need to understand here today is that the choices for someone like me are limited. I could just as easily have ended up in prison like my brother. Without the chance to attend a community college, I hate to think where I'd be today.
>
> *— African-American male, mid-20s, testifying at IBHE hearings of the Committee to Study Affordability*

It is an intriguing question: without the chance to attend a community college, where would many people be?

This report was written to promote discussion and encourage innovation and action. The world has changed dramatically and so must our systems for delivering education. The community college is best positioned to respond to the challenges facing all of higher education.

The barriers that confront our institutions are both internal and external. Internally, our colleges must transform themselves to meet emerging student and constituent demands. Externally, we must increase our efforts to ensure that financial aid reaches the neediest students and that workforce preparation be centralized in community colleges.

It is no longer enough to say, "our door is open." A growing number of adult students who are entering our doors simply are not ready for the increased rigors of a community college education. At the same time, the higher skill levels demanded by our workforce are stretching existing resources to the limit.

With the need for a skilled workforce greater than at any time in our history, community colleges may very well be entering their "golden age." Business and industry view us as partners. Our students will be their employees. Their employees will keep our nation competitive in the global economy.

Truly, the opportunity for community colleges in Illinois is without limits. Our challenge is to remove existing barriers and extend this extraordinary opportunity to all our citizens.

V. **Challenge: To enhance teaching and learning through 1) expanded use of technology; 2) results of research on teaching and learning; 3) faculty experimentation in classroom teaching; and 4) acknowledgment of student differences.**

Recommendations:

35. Use telecommunications to keep faculty abreast of technological advances and effective teaching methods.

36. Encourage and reward the development of teaching behaviors that are recognized as critical success factors in community college teaching: students must be active participants in the process; experiential learning supports theoretical learning; students learn that which is made meaningful; and students need assistance recognizing their individual strengths and weaknesses.

37. Give faculty the opportunity and encouragement to participate in advanced education coursework and other professional development activities that address the needs of adult learners and nontraditional students.

VI. **Challenge: To provide an inclusive, multicultural climate for learning that acknowledges the diversity of our society and the students we serve and helps prepare students to live and work in a world in which cultural diversity will be a daily reality.**

38. Provide staff/faculty development in gender-balanced, multicultural education so that community colleges do a better job of including the growing number of culturally diverse students in both the teaching/learning process and the curriculum.

39. Assist community colleges in evaluating, assessing, and creating inclusive educational communities for all students and staff.

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APPENDIX A

In recent years, college costs have increased faster than inflation and family income. Although increases in student grant aid have also surpassed inflation, these increases have not been sufficient to allow aid to keep pace with cost increases. Most specifically, the level of support provided by federal grant aid has dropped off in recent years. While the Federal Pell Grant maximum increased from $2,100 in FY1986 to $2,340 in FY1996, this maximum grant, in terms of constant dollars, actually decreased nearly 20 percent during this ten-year time period. As a result, needy students are faced with the burden of paying an increased share of college costs, and access and retention for these students are being threatened.

Data from FY1995 applicants support the concern about access for very needy students. Table 6 below shows payment claim information by family contribution level, and indicates that students from the lowest-income families, those with a zero expected family contribution (EFC), claimed MAP awards at a lower rate (61%) than other students. Zero EFC students are those determined by the Federal Methodology (FM) to have no financial resources available for college after a minimal family maintenance allowance is subtracted from income. Some students may even lack the resources needed to meet basic subsistence needs.

Table 6: Summary of FY1995 MAP Claims* by EFC

EFC	Number Eligible	Number Paid	Percent Paid	Dollar Eligibility	Dollars Paid	Percent Dollars Paid	Average Paid Award
$0	86,421	52,702	61.0%	$189,833,783	$84,898,132	44.7%	$1,611
$1 - $1,000	32,844	23,989	73.1%	$79,613,002	$46,625,263	58.6%	$1,944
$1,001 - $2,000	26,177	19,326	73.9%	$64,673,520	$38,749,148	59.9%	$2,005
$2,001 - $3,000	17,244	12,691	73.6%	$43,058,218	$26,621,348	61.9%	$2,098
$3,001 - $4,000	10,621	7,675	72.3%	$28,763,607	$17,533,345	61.1%	$2,287
$4,001 - $5,000	6,803	4,951	72.8%	$18,351,832	$11,665,877	63.6%	$2,356
$5,001 & Up	7,789	5,859	75.2%	$22,334,101	$13,533,345	60.6%	$2,310
Total	187,899	127,193	67.7%	$446,628,063	$239,626,458	53.7%	$1,884

** Taken from Agenda Book of the September 29, 1995 meeting of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission*